



King County

Citizens' Advisory Commission on Homeless Encampments

Meeting Summary July 27, 2004

Commissioners Present: Rhonda Berry, Capt. Carl Cole, Shane Davies, Dini Duclos, Paul Fischburg, Bill Hobson, Bill Kirlin-Hackett, Sandra Kortum, Alan Painter, Chaplain Al Patterson, Holly Plackett, Steven Pyeatt, Susan Rynas, Bob Santos, Judy Schnebele, Ron Swicord, Robert Thompson MD, Rev. Harriett Walden, Linda Weedman, Janna Wilson, Tony Lee

Commissioner Absent: Doug Stevenson

Guests: John Briggs, Ritva Manchester, Leo Rhodes, Scott Marrow, Norman Milliard, Carol Camern, Bob Burns, Anitra Freeman, Tina Shamseldin

Staff Present: David Wertheimer, Jackie MacLean, Sherry Hamilton, Janice Hougen

David Wertheimer, CACHE Project Manager, welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked everyone to introduce themselves. Jackie MacLean passed out additional materials that were not sent out before the meeting, including various articles, copies of written testimony from the two public hearings, responses to questions submitted by commissioners, and the DCHS 2003 Annual Report. Jackie MacLean stated that answers to the follow up questions would be e-mailed to commissioners by Friday, July 30, 2004 along with the agenda for the August 2 meeting.

Wertheimer presented the first exercise, which was an open discussion amongst commission members to identify core principles. All commission members had the opportunity to state what they felt was a core principle. Below is a list of the core principles that were listed in the discussion:

- ☐ There is not enough affordable, accessible housing for those who are homeless in King County
- ☐ Basic survival comes first
- ☐ It is not the government's role to take care of people (based on interpretation of the US Constitution)
- ☐ The scope of homelessness and its causes are large and complex
- ☐ Society's approach to ending homelessness must be planful
- ☐ Society must break the cycle of homelessness by providing safe, sustainable, permanent, appropriate housing opportunities
- ☐ Tent cities will not solve or end homelessness
- ☐ Shelter without needed treatment is an insufficient response to homelessness
- ☐ Government can play a role in providing land, housing and financing to address homelessness
- ☐ Government has played and will continue to play a role in helping residents get and keep housing
- ☐ Government has played an historic and active role in caring for residents/citizens, including those who cannot care for themselves

- ❑ Because of the scope of the problem, addressing homelessness will require governments, business, foundations, churches, not-for-profits, and residents to work together
- ❑ Tent cities do not meet the definition of dignified shelter in King County communities
- ❑ Long-term homelessness is a chronic state of emergency
- ❑ Shelter should be a short-term stepping point to permanent housing
- ❑ Responses to homelessness require accountability at all levels
- ❑ Homelessness is a King County, state and national problem, not just a Seattle problem
- ❑ Tent cities are better than nothing

Wertheimer moved the commission on to the next step: seeing which of these core principles the commission members could support unanimously. Those principles that the membership could agree upon would ultimately become part of the commission report's preamble. Wertheimer established that there were 17 voting commission members present and four advisory members without voting privileges.

A separate vote was called on each of the identified core principles. In the end, five core principles were agreed upon unanimously:

1. There is not enough affordable housing for the homeless in King County
2. The scope of homelessness and its causes are large and complex
3. Tent cities will not solve or end homelessness
4. Shelter without needed treatment is an insufficient response to homelessness
5. Shelter should be a short term stepping point to permanent housing

Wertheimer moved the discussion to focus on two key decision areas for the commission in developing their report: the need for homeless encampments in King County and the development of recommendations related to locating homeless encampments on public and/or private land in King County.

The first area of discussion was around the need for homeless encampments in King County. A straight up or down vote of this question yielded 9 votes yes and 8 votes no. Wertheimer opened the discussion for additional considerations or addenda that would change a person's vote and foster greater consensus around this question. Several noted that tent cities were not an adequate response and to approve the use of tent cities by voting that they are needed would allow them to exist indefinitely. The following additional considerations/addenda were identified:

1. A clear line in the sand. A sunset date for phasing out encampments must be required – date to be determined
2. Homeless encampments are needed at present because King County has failed to provide adequate responses to homelessness
3. Careful management and oversight, size limits and service linkages must be critical components of approved encampments

Wertheimer called a second vote on the need for homeless encampments in King County. There were 10 yes votes and 7 no votes. Within the “no” votes, five commissioners indicated they voted “no” because encampments are not an acceptable option for homeless persons in King County and other more viable alternatives are needed immediately. Two commissioners voted “no” because they feel that encampments are a viable option for homeless persons in King County and there should be no sunset date set for phasing out of encampments.

The next recommendation discussion point related to locating homeless encampment on public and/or private land in King County. A straight up or down vote was taken on four different options: just private land, just public land, both public and private land, neither public nor private land. There were 5 votes for private land, 0 votes for public land, 10 votes for both private and public and 2 votes for neither public nor private land.

Wertheimer opened the discussion for additional considerations or addenda that would change a person’s vote and foster greater consensus around this question. The following was identified:

1. Require specific developer standards/criteria for approval of encampments on public land (including health and safety criteria) as is currently practiced with other housing developers using public lands.

Wertheimer called a second vote concerning locating homeless encampments on public and/or private land. There were 5 votes for private land only, 9 votes for both public and private, 2 votes for neither, and 1 vote abstaining. Of the commissioners voting for private land only, four indicated that there should be no use of public lands for encampments whatsoever; one commissioner indicated that there should be no requirement for specific developer standards or criteria for approval of encampments similar to criteria used for other housing development projects.

Wertheimer concluded the meeting. The next meeting will look at the policies and procedures to be considered for siting homeless encampments. Wertheimer will prepare a draft outline for the final commission report that will be discussed at the August 2 meeting.